

Minutes of the East Greenwich School Committee

Tuesday, April 4, 2017

East Greenwich High School Auditorium

300 Avenger Drive

East Greenwich, RI 02818

Those in attendance were Ms. Carolyn Mark, Chair; Mrs. Mary Ellen Winters, Vice-Chair; Mr. Matt Plain; Mr. Michael Fain; Mr. Jeff Dronzek; Dr. Lori McEwen; and Dr. Yan Sun. Dr. Victor Mercurio, Superintendent was also in attendance.

7:00 p.m. Regular Meeting

I. Call to Order

Ms. Mark called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m.

II. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

The meeting commenced with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

III. Recognitions

- a. Chris Cobain, R.I. Interscholastic Athletic Director of the Year**
- b. Beth Cauley, Wilfred Berube Award for Administrative Excellence**
- c. Nicholas Rath, Barnes and Noble Teacher of the Year**

Mr. Cobain, Mrs. Cauley, and Mr. Rath were recognized and congratulated on their achievements.

IV. Public Comments

Mr. Greg Wei, community member, expressed his support for the World Language Program. He discussed the importance of learning a second language and the effect it's had on his life.

V. Approval of Minutes

a. Budget Workshop for March 16, 2017

On a motion by Mrs. Winters, which was seconded by Dr. McEwen, the Committee voted 6-0 to approve the minutes. Mr. Fain abstained.

b. Regular and Executive for March 21, 2017

On a motion by Mrs. Winters, which was seconded by Dr. Sun, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve the regular and executive minutes.

VI. Superintendent's Report

a. Kindergarten Registration

Kindergarten registration took place yesterday and today at Frenchtown School. Registration is scheduled for Wednesday and Thursday at Meadowbrook (9:30-11:00am). Notice has been given via the Superintendent's Field memo, school list servs, and the district list serv.

VII. Action Items

a. Parental leave request-Caitlin Wotherspoon, Teacher, Cole

On a motion by Mrs. Winters, which was seconded by Dr. Sun, the Committee voted 7-0 to approve the parental leave request.

b. Retirement-Susan Elson, Grade K Teacher, Frenchtown

On a motion by Mrs. Winters, which was seconded by Dr. McEwen, the Committee voted 7-0 to accept the retirement. Ms. Elson will be recognized in June.

c. Second Read/Discussion/Possible Adoption #2160 Transportation Policy

Mr. Plain read through several revisions that he crafted (dated

4-1-17). These revisions have not gone before the full Policy Committee yet. The first revision is to “transportation of students by school”). Mr. Plain suggested striking the language regarding insurance and moving violations. General language in the “bus transportation” section was added to mirror state statute 16-21-1. The next revision change to “bus transportation” adds “student’s individual needs.” Mr. Dronzek discussed the walking parameter changes that were vetted by the Transportation Subcommittee and the East Greenwich Police Department. Officer Montalban was present to answer questions. Language was added to clarify the parameters for walking distance. Language was also inserted to include daycare requests on the transportation request form. Mr. Plain also discussed legislative proposals regarding transportation. Proposal 16-21-1.1 passed. This allows the School Committee to maintain a registry of students who require busing and can be used to assist the district in providing more cost-effective transportation (opt in/opt out). Language was also included to allow transportation for those students who register after August 1st (change from may to “shall” be assigned a bus). Ms. Christine Baranski discussed concerns with k-2 students with increased traffic and new walking distances at Meadowbrook. Mrs. Joanne Leach discussed concerns regarding safety and Main Street. Ms. Tara Wood, a Policy Committee member (community) asked if the Committee could postpone the vote until the rest of the Policy Committee has time to review the suggested changes. Ms. Mark asked if the policy could be referred to the full Policy Committee prior to taking action. On a motion by

Mr. Fain, which was seconded by Mrs. Winters, the Committee voted 7-0 to refer this policy back to the Policy Committee.

d. FY2018 Budget Adoption

Ms. Mark explained the budget process noting the Committee needs to adopt a budget and send to the town by April 15th. A joint meeting between the School Committee/Town Council will take place in May. Ms. Mark also explained the meeting format for the evening. After last week's budget workshop, the Superintendent and Administrative Council met again to review the budget proposal and make recommended cuts.

Dr. Mercurio provided a slide presentation of the budget reductions with proposed changes from the last meeting. High school and middle sports were put back into the budget. Intermurals were removed (\$20,513.86). Dr. Mercurio explained the RIIL rules and the fact that the district must give notice six months' in advance if a sport will not run. \$100,000 was added back into the budget proposal for facilities. \$20,000 was added back for professional development. \$50,000 was removed from the technology budget, but keeps a 1:1 refresh. Four paraprofessionals; an application developer; one library/media specialist; one grade two teacher; and the capstone sections were removed from the proposed budget. Transportation savings assume moving back to a three-tier system and the reduction of one bus (savings from walking distances). Total reductions proposed equal \$1,391,884.34. Fund balance dollars included in FY2018 total \$794,955.

The Committee discussed and commented on the proposed cuts. Ms. Mark opened the floor to public comments.

Joanne Capaldi, Secretary at Cole, spoke on behalf of the paraprofessionals. She stated the paras are the least paid and the first on the “chopping block.” Mrs. Capaldi explained the work of the paraprofessionals and discussed the responsibility of the position and the assistance they provide to teachers/students.

Sherry Mong, Secretary at EGHS/community member discussed the huge role that paraprofessionals and custodians have in the schools.

Joanne Abella, Reading Specialist at EGHS/community member asked how the district got into the budget crisis with a \$1.5 million deficit. She also discussed the high tax rate in East Greenwich compared with her home value.

Maria Avedesian, Paraprofessional at Frenchtown, discussed the rewarding experience being a paraprofessional and the supportive role kindergarten paraprofessionals have in the schools.

Christian Roos, community member, discussed the number of proposed budget cuts.

John Liesching, community member, questioned two lines he said

were “glossed over”

which are purchase of technology services and purchase of property services. He noted the 25% increase in both lines. He also discussed fund balance and the local ask from the town.

Christine Carr, Physical Education Teacher, Frenchtown discussed the work done by paraprofessionals and teachers.

Dave Gecawich, community member, discussed the skills that are in demand in technology and needed in this state. He also discussed BYOD.

Jack Gecawich, student at Cole, discussed the capstone program and the importance of maintaining rigorous programs in East Greenwich.

Paul Dembinski, community member, said he’s seen no attempt to get to a zero percent increase, positions being cut are closest to the children, no impact to athletics, and his taxes are increasing.

Kelli O’Neill, Social Studies Teacher at Cole, discussed the importance of trade books and textbooks and the importance of having a librarian at Cole.

Deb McMullen, Cole Physical Education Teacher and community member asked how the

district got into the current situation. She also discussed the valuable role that intermurals play and how they can run for \$3,000. Dr. Mercurio said the entire fund for intermurals is stipends.

Public comment ended at 9:45 p.m. Ms. Mark opened the floor for School Committee discussion. Mr. Dronzek encouraged the public to call or email him and he will run through the budget details. He explained how the district got into the current situation. Many things were unexpected or were increases over time. Fund balance has also been used to support the budget (now and in previous years). Every year the district has been running a structural deficit, which has been pointed out for years. The district also receives lower level funding from the town. The district has received one-time hits from health insurance (lower costs), but can't count on these funds. Every year prior to any proposed increases, statutory step increases, health care costs, and transportation costs need to be built into the budget. These items represent an approximately 2% increase each year before other items are addressed. Also about 30% of the population is using student services (IEP, 504, RTI, etc.). Mr. Dronzek went on to explain the significant increase in student enrollment over the past number of years and that something needs to be changed. The transportation bid also came back with a 13% increase for the new contract. The bid was vetted carefully, but only one vendor responded. Mr. Dronzek said the deficit is not due to mismanagement. Mr. Plain explained how the teachers' receive a yearly step increase that is mandated by R.I. statute.

Mr. Dronzek made a motion to approve the FY2018 proposed budget amount of \$35,379,970, which is a 4% increase in local appropriation with the proposed cuts plus a reduction of fund balance of \$125,000; a reduction in athletics of \$23-\$25,000; a reduction in maintenance of \$25,000 (as placeholders for a budget with a 4% increase). The Committee also reserves the right to change adjustments (from the reduction areas) and re-appropriate (into other areas). Mr. Fain seconded the motion, which passed 6-1. Mrs. Winters voted no.

footnote:

Although Mr. Dronzek's Motion was made in reference to the local appropriation sought of \$35,379,970, it was clearly his intent to make a motion to pass a budget seeking an overall appropriation of \$39,646,475, consistent with the revenue projection document that was before the school committee and which formed part of the public record. Further, it was the intent of the school committee as a body to pass a budget amounting \$39,646,475, and these minutes are amended to reflect the intent and actions of the school committee.

VIII. Advisory/Subcommittee Updates

a. SEAC

Patty Harwood gave an update on the March 22nd meeting. The focus of the meeting was on FY2018 budget proposals and

reductions. SEAC plans to sponsor a parent workshop in the fall on dyslexia and reading disorders. RIDE has funds to support professional development on dyslexia. The date for the EG Transition Night is to be determined. (date to be determined). The next SEAC meeting is scheduled for

May 10, 2017 at 6:30 p.m. at Cole.

b. Finance Committee

The Committee met last week to discuss the budget and cuts that were proposed at the last meeting. Mr. Dronzek said the Committee does not have new suggestions to solve the budget problems. The Committee is looking to create more revenue and efficiencies in transportation and other places throughout the district. Long-term planning needs to be in process to foresee challenges down the road that will impact the future.

The group also discussed the possibility of BYOD (bring your own device). Compatibility issues and other areas with BYOD were discussed. The Committee also discussed possible savings in transportation if one bus is eliminated.

c. Transportation Subcommittee

The Committee discussed having a parent liaison at each school next year to assist administration with bus issues. The issues would then go through one contact (Mr. Dronzek, Mr. Fain, or Dr. Mercurio) to avoid excessive calls to the bus company each day. This may help identify areas of concern that are happening at each school or multiple schools.

IX. School Committee Concerns/Important Matters Pending

There were no concerns.

X. Adjournment

On a motion by Mr. Fain, which was seconded by Dr. Sun, the Committee voted 7-0 to adjourn at 10:12 p.m.

CHRISTINE DIMEGLIO

SECRETARY